

Pte. F.Covey – The Duke of Wellington’s (West Riding Regiment)

Frank William Covey was born in Pulborough, Sussex, in 1895. He was the son of David and Emma Covey who lived at ‘Meadow View’, Watson Road, Westcott and was a milkman in civilian life. He enlisted as a Driver in the Army Service Corps at Guildford on 24th August 1914, three weeks after the declaration of war and arrived in France less than a month later on 22nd September 1914.

On 16th June 1915 Frank was admitted to hospital and after a spell in the Convalescent Camp at Etaples, near Dieppe, was transferred to No 6 Reserve Park again as a Driver. On 24th September 1917, he was compulsorily transferred to 8th Battalion West Riding Regiment in the ‘interests of the service’ – the reasons for this were usually to bring infantry battalions up to strength and make up for losses.

In January 1918 Frank was granted home leave and shortly after his return on 9th February was transferred to 9th Battalion West Riding Regiment which was engaged in the aftermath of the Battle of Cambrai where, two months earlier, the British Army had used large numbers of tanks for the first time. After a preliminary bombardment, 324 tanks had moved forward in support of the infantry advancing along a six-mile front. The tanks had taken the Germans by surprise, created a decisive breach in their defences and gained five miles.

News of this breakthrough brought the hope that the stalemate of trench warfare might be broken; church bells were rung across Britain to celebrate the victory, but it was short-lived. The Germans were able to check the advance and turn the tide. With the addition of strong reinforcements from the east following the ending of their war against Russia, the Germans regained the ground they had lost and forced the British even further back.

On 14th February 1918 the 9th Battalion West Riding Regiment was in action near Flesquieres, five miles to the west of Cambrai. It was during this action that Frank Covey was killed, just five days after returning from his home leave. This was the scene of bitter fighting for many months; Flesquieres was not finally taken until 27th September 1918. He is buried in Flesquieres Hill Military Cemetery. He was 22.